

**IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE NORTHERN DISTRICT OF ILLINOIS
EASTERN DIVISION**

NAPLETON'S ARLINGTON HEIGHTS
MOTORS, INC., *et al.*,

Plaintiffs,

v.

FCA US, LLC, *et al.*,

Defendants.

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CASE NO. 1:16-cv-0403

Hon. Virginia M. Kendall

PLAINTIFFS' MOTION TO LIFT STAY OF DISCOVERY

1. Plaintiffs are automobile dealerships selling vehicles manufactured by Defendants. The complaint alleges that Defendants engaged in a fraudulent scheme to inflate their monthly sales data by offering kickbacks to dealers who compete with Plaintiffs in exchange for reporting vehicles as sold that would then be “unwound” the following month. Dkt. 21 ¶¶ 9, 35-36, 38, 47-48. Plaintiffs allege that Defendants were motivated by the appearance of sales volume growth, and in particular, a desire to continue touting a supposed 70-month record of year-on-year sales growth to their investors. *Id.* ¶ 2. Discovery is currently stayed in this case pending the outcome of the Defendants’ motion to dismiss [Dkt. 57].

2. Much has changed in the four months since the discovery stay was entered, and permitting discovery to go forward in light of these new facts cannot possibly impose any undue burden on Defendants.

3. In the past four months since discovery was stayed, FCA has been subject to increasing scrutiny from the investigative arms of the federal government in connection with

allegations of false sales reporting — the same allegations underpinning the Complaint. [Dkt. 21 ¶¶ 9, 35-38.]

4. On July 11, 2016, according to media outlets covering the story, investigators from the FBI and SEC conducted coordinated visits and/or raids of FCA's Auburn Hills, Michigan offices and of FCA field staff in their homes. (Representative news articles are attached as Exhibit A.)

5. On July 18, 2016, FCA issued a press release (attached as Exhibit B) that “confirm[ed] that it is cooperating with an SEC investigation into the reporting of vehicle unit sales to end customers in the U.S.” *Id.* It further revealed that “[i]nquiries into similar issues were recently made by the U.S. Department of Justice. FCA will cooperate fully with these investigations.” *Id.*

6. On July 28, 2016, despite its earlier public comments that Plaintiff's allegations were “baseless,” FCA published a detailed press release (attached as Exhibit C) that surely required significant investigation and compiling of documents and data to prepare. In the press release, FCA admitted that its sales reporting data was indeed incorrect, and that its “streak” of year-over-year monthly sales growth had actually ended nearly four years ago:

FCA US in March of this year last commented specifically about a “streak” of year-over-year monthly sales improvements since April of 2010. Applying this new methodology, during the periods presented below, year-over-year monthly sales would have declined in September 2013 (-3%), August 2015 (-1%) and May 2016 (-7%). The so called “sales streak” would have stopped in September 2013 (after 40 months) and would have had three additional periods of sequential year-over-year improvements of 22, 8, and 1 month(s).

Ex. D at 2-3.

7. Also in the July 28 press release, FCA acknowledged the plausibility of the Plaintiff's core contentions in the Complaint:

It is possible for a dealer to “unwind” a transaction recorded in the NVDR system and return the vehicle to the dealer's unsold inventory. This “unwind” results in the return by the dealer of any incentives paid by FCA US to the dealer for the sale and it cancels the beginning of the warranty period . . . It is admittedly also possible that a dealer may register the sale in an effort to meet a volume objective (without a specific customer supporting the transaction).”

Ex. C at 1; *compare* Dkt. 21 ¶¶ 47-48.

8. FCA even admitted that 4,500 vehicles were “previously reported as sold” but in fact “remain[ed] in dealer stock” after those reported sales were later unwound. Ex. C at 3. The Company now promises to overhaul its sales reporting process.

9. FCA’s cooperation with the open criminal investigations and its own internal work to issue its public *mea culpas* have vanished any burden for FCA to also comply with its discovery obligations in this civil case. For FCA to have “fully cooperate[d]” with the open criminal investigations into its sales reporting practices, Ex. C, it surely collected, reviewed, and produced documents overlapping with Plaintiff’s document requests.

10. Given these developments, FCA can no longer show “good cause” justifying a continued stay of discovery. *New England Carpenters Health and Welfare Fund v. Abbott Laboratories*, No. 12 C 1662, 2013 WL 690613, at *1 (N.D. Ill. Feb. 20, 2013). Plaintiffs seek narrowly tailored discovery requests that overlap substantially with the ongoing investigation into FCA’s sales practices and FCA’s public disclosures to date about these practices. [Dkt. 50-1, Ex. B.] To the extent FCA has specific objections to these requests, that is no ground for a blanket stay of all discovery, in light of these new facts.

11. WHEREFORE, Plaintiffs respectfully request that the Court grant an order that the stay of discovery is lifted and that discovery is to proceed in this case consistent with the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure.

Dated: September 29, 2016

Respectfully submitted,

The Napleton Plaintiffs

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CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

I HEREBY CERTIFY that this document filed through the CM/ECF system was served upon counsel for Defendants electronically through the CM/ECF system on September 29, 2016.

By: /s/ David J. Ogles

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EXHIBIT A

Automotive News

Fiat Chrysler sales reporting practices subject of U.S. probe Dealer field staff offices and homes searched July 11, source says

Larry P. Vellequette 

Automotive News | July 18, 2016 - 12:45 pm EST

FCA US, which has chalked up 75 straight months of U.S. sales gains, is facing a coordinated federal probe into its sales reporting practices. Investigators from the FBI and the SEC visited FCA field staff in their homes and offices on July 11 as part of the probe, a source told Automotive News.

DETROIT -- FCA US, which has chalked up 75 straight months of U.S. sales gains, is facing a coordinated federal probe into its sales reporting practices.

FCA, in a statement Monday, said it will "cooperate fully" with a Securities and Exchange Commission investigation into its "reporting of vehicle unit sales to end customers." The automaker also said it will cooperate with "inquiries into similar issues ... recently made by the U.S. Department of Justice."

Investigators from the FBI and the SEC visited FCA field staff in their homes and offices on July 11 as part of the probe, a source told *Automotive News*.

Federal staff attorneys also visited the headquarters of FCA US in Auburn Hills, Mich., the same day, the source said. The person added that FCA employees were advised not to speak with investigators without counsel present.

Raids or visits also were conducted in Orlando, Dallas and California, the source said, and involved current and former FCA employees.

The probe is in an early stage, according to two unnamed people cited by Bloomberg News, who asked not to be identified because the investigation is confidential.

Led by its Ram and Jeep brands, FCA US has boosted U.S. sales 6.5 percent in 2016, putting it on track for a seventh straight year of growth since its U.S.-steered bankruptcy. Its 75-month sales winning streak is the longest of any automaker.

In its statement, FCA said that "in its annual and quarterly financial statements, FCA records revenues based on shipments to dealers and customers and not on reported vehicle unit sales to end customers."

A spokeswoman for the SEC declined to comment, while a spokeswoman for the FBI field office in Detroit said the agency would have no comment at this time.

Early this year, a dealership group in Illinois accused FCA US of civil racketeering in a federal civil lawsuit that alleged FCA paid dealers to improperly inflate sales. FCA called the allegations "baseless" and an attempt to "publicly smear" the automaker and sought dismissal of the suit.

However, in April, shortly after FCA formally responded to the suit from Napleton Automotive Group, the automaker began including a long disclaimer on its monthly U.S. sales reports. The disclaimer described FCA US's "method for determining monthly sales" and said, in part:

"FCA US reported vehicle sales represent sales of its vehicles to retail and fleet customers, as well as limited deliveries of vehicles to its officers, directors, employees and retirees. Sales from dealers to customers are reported to FCA US by dealers as sales are made on an ongoing basis through a new vehicle delivery reporting system that then compiles the reported data as of the end of each month.

“Sales through dealers do not necessarily correspond to reported revenues, which are based on the sale and delivery of vehicles to the dealers. In certain limited circumstances where sales are made directly by FCA US, such sales are reported through its management reporting system.”

Similar legal disclaimers have appeared in FCA's subsequent monthly sales reports. A spokesman said at the time that the disclaimers were unrelated to the Napleton allegations and lawsuit.

The Napleton suit has brought renewed attention to the way automakers **report sales** results in the U.S.

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FBI and SEC investigating Fiat Chrysler: Homes and offices searched

JULY 18, 2016



FCA appears to be under the gun, as both the FBI and SEC are investigating them for their sales practices

FIAT CHRYSLER BEING SCRUTINIZED FOR POSSIBLE FRAUD AND SECURITIES LAW VIOLATIONS

Investigators from the FBI and the Securities and Exchange Commission visited Fiat Chrysler (<http://autoweek.com/article/car-news/fca-pours-1-billion-facilities-jeep-production>) Automobiles field staff in their homes and offices this month as part of a coordinated investigation into the automaker's U.S. sales reporting practices, Automotive News has learned.

Federal staff attorneys also visited the headquarters of FCA US in Auburn Hills, Mich., the same day, July 11, a source with direct knowledge said. The person added that FCA employees were advised not to speak with investigators without counsel present. Raids or visits also were conducted in Orlando, Dallas and California, the source said, and included current and former FCA employees.

Mike Palese, a spokesman for FCA (<http://autoweek.com/article/technology/fca-offering-cold-hard-cash-hackers-find-bugs>), said July 11 that he was unaware of the visits but would investigate. Palese said later that day that the automaker was "looking into the matter that was raised and we don't have sufficient information to comment at this time."

FCA officials said Monday they would issue a statement on the matter later in the day.



CAR NEWS (/car-news)

Jeep gets \$1 billion investment in factories and facilities ([/article/car-news/fca-pours-1-billion-facilities-jeep-production](http://autoweek.com/article/car-news/fca-pours-1-billion-facilities-jeep-production))

Fiat Chrysler said Thursday it will invest \$1.05 billion in assembly plants in Ohio and Illinois to bolster Jeep output. The carmaker will invest \$350 million to move production of the Jeep Cherokee ...

([/article/car-news/fca-pours-1-billion-facilities-jeep-production](http://autoweek.com/article/car-news/fca-pours-1-billion-facilities-jeep-production))

Fiat Chrysler (<http://autoweek.com/article/recalls/fiat-chrysler-phase-out-takata-airbags-without-drying-agent>) is facing a U.S. Justice Department probe for fraud and prosecutors are scrutinizing whether the company violated U.S. securities laws, Bloomberg reported today.

The probe is in an early stage, according to two unnamed people cited by Bloomberg, who asked not to be identified because the investigation is confidential and declined to specify what conduct is being investigated.

A spokeswoman for the SEC declined to comment, while a spokeswoman for the FBI field office in Detroit said the agency would have no comment at this time.

This year, a dealership group in Illinois accused FCA US of civil racketeering in a federal civil lawsuit that alleged FCA paid dealers to improperly inflate sales. The automaker called the allegations "baseless" and an attempt to "publicly smear" the automaker and sought dismissal of the suit.



(/article/technology/fca-offering-cold-hard-cash-hackers-find-bugs)

TECHNOLOGY (/car-news/technology)

Fiat Chrysler: \$1,500 if you find a software bug (/article/technology/fca-offering-cold-hard-cash-hackers-find-bugs)

Fiat-Chrysler is offering a "bug bounty" financial reward to anyone who can find a security hole in its automotive electronics. The company says it will pay \$1,500 per bug, ...

However, in April, shortly after FCA formally responded to the suit from Napleton Automotive Group, the automaker began including a long disclaimer on its monthly U.S. sales reports. The disclaimer described FCA US's "method for determining monthly sales" and said, in part:

"FCA US reported vehicle sales represent sales of its vehicles to retail and fleet customers, as well as limited deliveries of vehicles to its officers, directors, employees and retirees. Sales from dealers to customers are reported to FCA US by dealers as sales are made on an ongoing basis through a new vehicle delivery reporting system that then compiles the reported data as of the end of each month.

"Sales through dealers do not necessarily correspond to reported revenues, which are based on the sale and delivery of vehicles to the dealers. In certain limited circumstances where sales are made directly by FCA US, such sales are reported through its management reporting system."

Similar legal disclaimers have appeared in FCA's subsequent monthly sales reports. A spokesman said at the time that the disclaimers were unrelated to the Napleton allegations and lawsuit.

The article "*FBI, SEC investigating FCA US sales practices*" (<http://www.autonews.com/article/20160718/RETAIL/160719858/fbi-sec-investigating-fca-us-sales-practices>) first appeared on *Automotive News* (<http://www.autonews.com/>).

By Larry P. Vellequette, Automotive News

READ THIS NEXT

EXHIBIT B



PRESS RELEASE

FCA Statement in Response to Press Reports

In response to press reports today, FCA confirms that it is cooperating with an SEC investigation into the reporting of vehicle unit sales to end customers in the U.S. In its annual and quarterly financial statements, FCA records revenues based on shipments to dealers and customers and not on reported vehicle unit sales to end customers.

Inquiries into similar issues were recently made by the U.S. Department of Justice. FCA will cooperate fully with these investigations.

London, 18 July 2016

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EXHIBIT C

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FCA US LLC EXPLANATORY NOTE ON SALES REPORTING PROCESS

July 26, 2016 , Auburn Hills, Mich. - Recent press reports have raised questions about the manner in which FCA US reports vehicle unit sales data on a monthly basis. These reports have mistakenly suggested that potential inaccuracies in the monthly data somehow impact the integrity of FCA's reported revenues in its financial statements.

This note is intended to explain how FCA US's monthly sales reporting process has worked, recognizing the limitations inherent in a process that collects sales data entered by some 2,600 dealers until midnight of the last reporting day of a month and releases the aggregate data typically within 8 hours of the final data entries.

FCA US believes that its current process has been in place in more or less the same form for more than 30 years, with reporting previously being made every 10 days and eventually evolving into monthly cycles.

The vehicle unit sales data reported by FCA US is comprised of three main components: (a) sales made by dealers to retail customers; (b) sales of vehicles shipped directly by FCA US to fleet customers and (c) other retail sales including sales by dealers in Puerto Rico, limited deliveries through distributors and a small number of vehicles delivered to FCA employees and retirees and vehicles used for marketing.

Dealer Sales

Retail sales data is collected from the dealers (through a reporting system called the New Vehicle Delivery Report, or NVDR). This system is primarily designed to capture the time of a retail sale for two purposes. First, the date of sale recorded in the NVDR system begins the retail customer's warranty coverage on the vehicle. Second, the recording of the retail sale in the NVDR system triggers FCA US's obligation to make any manufacturer's incentive payments to the dealer. These incentives may be based on the particular model sold, the number of certain models sold in the period and the achievement of certain overall dealer volume objectives.

These retail sales are made by dealers out of their own inventory of vehicles. This inventory was purchased by the dealers from FCA US before any retail delivery to the customer. Consistent with other automakers' practices, it is this initial sale -- by FCA US to the dealer -- that triggers revenue recognition in FCA US, and not the ultimate sale of the vehicle by a dealer to a retail customer. It is for this reason that the process of reporting monthly retail unit sales has no impact on the revenue reported by FCA in its financial statements.

It is possible for a dealer to "unwind" a transaction recorded in the NVDR system and return the vehicle to the dealer's unsold inventory. This "unwind" results in the return by the dealer of any incentives paid by FCA US to the dealer for the sale and it cancels the beginning of the warranty period. These unwinds may, and in fact do, occur for a number of reasons including: inability of the retail customer to finalize financing for the purchase or a change in customer preferences, among others. It is admittedly also possible that a dealer may register the sale in an effort to meet a volume objective (without a specific customer supporting the transaction). There is, however, no obvious economic incentive for a dealer to do so, since FCA US's policy is to reverse all incentives due or paid to a dealer that resulted from the unwound retail sales transaction.

When reporting monthly retail sales in the morning of the first day of the following month, a manufacturer cannot know which, if any, transactions may be unwound after the data is released. Because FCA US believes that most unwinds are recorded shortly following the time the initial sale is registered in the NVDR system, FCA US has not historically reflected either unwinds or the subsequent sales of these vehicles in its sales reporting. As a safeguard against double reporting, however, FCA US blocks the vehicle identification number (VIN) in its NVDR files to ensure that a subsequent retail sale of the vehicle does not enter into any tally of reported sales in any future month (i.e. a vehicle cannot be counted twice as a retail sale by the dealer).

Fleet and Other Retail Sales

The other component of the monthly reported unit sales has been vehicles that FCA US delivers directly, principally to fleet accounts, and retail and other sales consisting of limited deliveries through distributors and a small number of vehicles for company and marketing uses. Sales by dealers in Puerto Rico have also been included in other retail sales.

CONTACT INFORMATION

Please [login](#) to view contact details.

Shawn Morgan

ATTACHED

FCA U.S. Sales: New Methodology vs. Previously Reported

It has been a matter of historical practice (going back many years before 2009 bankruptcy) for FCA US and its predecessors to maintain a "reserve" of vehicles in this category that had been shipped but not been reported as "sold" in the monthly sales reports. While the origin of this practice is unclear and is being looked into, FCA US believes that it was probably originally designed to exclude from the reported sales number vehicles that were in transit to fleet customers, as well as vehicles that were not yet deployed in the field (because, for example, they were being tailored by the fleet customer or a third party to the fleet customer's specifications). The rationale for this exclusion, we believe, was to introduce some level of conformity in the reported monthly numbers, since the sales data was intended to reflect vehicles put in use during the month.

This "not-in-use reserve" has ranged in size from month to month, and resulted from a subjective assessment at month-end. A review of the data suggests that the reserve has always been positive, such that FCA US has always, in the aggregate, reported fewer sales than the aggregate number of shipped units on a running basis. Nevertheless, there appears to be no objective methodology for establishing and maintaining such a reserve and thus several plausible values exist for such a reserve. To the extent that the methodology historically used does not yield a unique value, the outcome is inherently arbitrary.

Our Evaluation of Past Practices and a Way Forward

Our review of industry practice has not revealed a standard reporting practice among OEMs in the U.S., although we believe that FCA US's competitors have used broadly similar approaches in compiling monthly sales data.

The complexity of this compilation task is unique to the U.S. In Europe, for example, automakers generally report data generated by the national vehicle registration offices on the basis of the number of vehicles licensed by government agencies in a given month. The data is thus verified by a third party and is not subject to interpretation by the automakers. Due to the nature of the U.S. registration system involving 50 states with diverse recording and reporting practices, applying a registration-based system in the U.S. has never been thought to be feasible.

FCA US has seriously considered simply ceasing to report this sales data on a monthly basis, and to rely only on published quarterly financial statements as a gauge of improvement or deterioration in our U.S. activities. We understand the sales data are used by some market followers, the automotive press in particular, to opine about the state of the industry and we accept that our decision to suspend monthly reporting would impact those constituencies and possibly may impair their perception, and in turn the public perception, of FCA US.

FCA US has therefore decided to continue monthly sales reporting with a revised methodology.

- Total sales will be comprised of
 - Dealer reported sales in the U.S.;
 - Fleet sales delivered directly by FCA US; and
 - Retail other sales including sales by dealers in Puerto Rico.
- Dealer reported sales (derived from the NVDR system) will be the sum of
 - All sales recorded by dealers during that month net of all unwound transactions recorded to the end of that month (whether the original sale was recorded in the current month or any prior month); plus
 - All sales of vehicles during that month attributable to past unwinds that had previously been reversed in determining monthly sales (in the current or prior months).
- Fleet sales will be recorded as sales upon shipment by FCA US of the vehicle to the customer or end user.
- Other retail sales will either be recorded when the sale is recorded in the NVDR system (for sales by dealers in Puerto Rico and limited sales made through distributors that submit NVDRs) or upon receipt of a similar delivery notification (for vehicles for which NVDRs are not entered such as vehicles for FCA executives and employees).

The objective of this new methodology is to provide in FCA US's judgment the best available estimate of the number of FCA US vehicles sold to end users through the end of a particular month applying a consistent and transparent methodology. It continues to include some level of estimation in respect of, for example, unwound transactions that straddle a month end and fleet deliveries, which may be placed into service at various times after shipment and delivery. FCA US believes, however, that the consistency in application and transparency of this new methodology provides the most appropriate data for the limited uses to which the monthly vehicle unit sales data should be applied.

FCA US has prepared unit sales reports going back to the beginning of 2011 using this approach, and has included the results in the attached Exhibit. The Exhibit also compares the data derived under this new methodology with previously reported US monthly sales data. This comparison yields the following results.

1. FCA US in March of this year last commented specifically about a "streak" of year-over-year monthly sales improvements since April of 2010. Applying this new methodology, during the periods presented below, year-over-year monthly sales would have declined in September 2013

(-3%), August 2015 (-1%) and May 2016 (-7%). The so called "sales streak" would have stopped in September 2013 (after 40 months) and would have had three additional periods of sequential year-over-year improvements of 22, 8, and 1 month(s).

2. Annual sales volumes under the new methodology for each year in the 2011-2016 period are within approximately 0.7% of the annual unit sales volumes previously reported.

3. The monthly adjustments to previously reported sales as a result of the adjustment to deduct sales later unwound and add back sales attributable to previously unwound sales over the period January 1, 2011 to June 30, 2016 are a mix of positive and negative numbers which did not exceed 0.5% of the reported data in any month. The maximum numerical reduction from previously reported data was 770 units (0.5% of the month's volume) in May 2015 and the maximum numerical addition to previously reported data was 437 units (0.4%) in September 2014. The total over the 2011 to 2016 period representing unwound transactions previously reported as sold for which vehicles remain in dealer stock at June 30, 2016, is approximately 4,500 vehicles, or 0.06% of the total volume reported over the period (7.7 million cars).

FCA US will report its July 2016 sales using the new methodology.

About FCA US LLC

FCA US LLC is a North American automaker with a new name and a long history. Headquartered in Auburn Hills, Michigan, FCA US is a member of the Fiat Chrysler Automobiles N.V. (FCA) family of companies. FCA US designs, engineers, manufactures and sells vehicles under the Chrysler, Jeep, Dodge, Ram and FIAT brands, as well as the SRT performance vehicle designation. The company also distributes the Alfa Romeo 4C model and Mopar products. FCA US is building upon the historic foundations of Chrysler, the innovative American automaker first established by Walter P. Chrysler in 1925; and Fiat, founded in Italy in 1899 by pioneering entrepreneurs, including Giovanni Agnelli.

FCA, the seventh-largest automaker in the world based on total annual vehicle sales, is an international automotive group. FCA is listed on the New York Stock Exchange under the symbol "FCAU" and on the Mercato Telematico Azionario under the symbol "FCA."

Follow FCA US news and video on:

FCA Content On Demand (COD): www.fcacod.com

Company blog: blog.fcanorthamerica.com

Company website: www.fcanorthamerica.com

FCA360: 360.fcanorthamerica.com

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